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ABSTRACT

A project to develop instructional materials for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction is described. It consisted of development and testing of materials on the correct use of American idioms to limited-English-speakers. Twenty-five idioms were selected for use as the basis of the script for an instructional videotape. The idioms were then incorporated into exercises, which were then compiled in handbooks for students and teachers (not included here). The videotape (not included here) features dramatized situations in which the idiom is used correctly, then dramatized interpretation of what the idiom seems to mean, and an explanation of what the idiom really means. A version of the videotape was also produced for the hearing-impaired. The current report describes the process of developing the materials and pilot-testing them with literacy students in several locations. Although there was not sufficient time to post-test students using the materials, it was found that they were well received by both students and literacy providers. A source address for the materials is provided. (MSE)
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FINAL REPORT

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN IDIOMS

BY

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ABSTRACT PAGE

Title: Production of an Interactive video to Use with the Cultural Literacy Handbook

Project No.: 098-3022 **Funding:** $17,533

Project Director: Ellen McDevitt **Phone No.:** 412-854-8433

Agency Address: 301 Church Road, Bethel Park, PA 15102

Description: Twenty five idioms were selected and used as the basis for a script for a video to illustrate the use of American idioms. The idioms were combined with learning exercises into a student handbook and a facilitators handbood. The video features dramatized situations in which the idioms are used correctly, then dramatized interpretation of what the idiom seems to mean, then an explanation of what the idioms really mean. The video contains stop time in each presentation so that the facilitator can stop the tape and discuss with students what they have seen and heard. The total video/handbook package was presented to literacy professionals in Allegheny and Chester Counties and in Erie. A version of the videotape was also produced for the hearing impaired.

Objectives:
To develop a printed instructional package based on the Cultural Literacy Handbook; to create a video that would illustrate the correct use of idioms; to teach students using the package and evaluate the effectiveness of the package. 1

Target Audience:

English as a Second Language (ESL) students in literacy programs in Allegheny and Chester Counties and in Erie.

Product(s)--if applicable:

A 25-idiom illustrated instructional handbook for facilitators, one for students, a video based on the handbook, a video for the hearing impaired, and a final report.

Method(s) of Evaluation:

ESL students in Allegheny and Chester Counties and in Erie were tested to determine their knowledge of 50 selected idioms. They were to have been tested again after using the complete video/handbook package, but the time available for the project didn't allow for that. The package was presented to literacy professional across the state who enthusiastically spproved of it.

Findings:

The literacy professionals and tutors who had an opportunity to use the handbooks and see the video were enthisiastic in their support of the package. They expressed definite interest in using the package in their programs and felt that it could be used as a guideline for developing their own scripts and discussions of idioms.

Conclusions:

The use of a video to reproduce situations in which idioms are used correctly and in context is a valuable way to teach idiomatic English to ESL students who do not frequently hear English being spoken outside the classroom.

Descriptors: (To be completed only by AdvancE staff)

INTRODUCTION

A common characteristic of students for whom English is a second language (ESL) is that they use their English only when in class, preferring to spend time with other fellow immigrants who can speak their native language. It is a natural preference, as anyone knows who has travelled in a country and been unable to speak the language. But as a result, the ESL student rarely experiences living English. Idioms are an important part of any language and may be said to be an indicator of one's fluency in that language. American idioms are especially difficult because many of the more common idioms literally say one thing and mean another.

The purpose of this project was to create a video that could enable ESL students to experience idioms being used correctly in common situations. The video would be designed to be used with the Cultural Literacy Handbook, an illustrated guide to 110 American idioms that had been produced by the South Hills Literacy Improvement Center in fiscal year 1991-92. The title of the project was listed as Production of an Interactive Video to Use with the Cultural Literacy Handbook. During the work on the project, however, we decided to simplify the title to express the essence of what we were trying to accomplish. The title of the video and the accompanying handbook, therefore, begins with the phrase that we so often hear from ESL students: What Does That Mean? A Guide to American Idioms.

The Project Director was Ellen McDevitt. Associate Director of the South Hills Literacy Improvement Center, who also wrote the script for the video and developed the instructional package for this project. The producer and director of the video was Paul McCollough. He also composed the original music for the video. Video editor was Kathy Krueger. Sound engineer was Brian Kness.

As we progressed into the work on the project, a staff member of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf saw the illustrated handbook and mentioned that the hearing impaired had the same difficulty understanding idioms that ESL students had. The project director obtained the support of Rosemary Garrity of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf for a version of the video for the hearing impaired. Additional funding was requested from Dr. John Christopher and he awarded the additional $2.207 to enable us to produce a version for the hearing impaired. We proceeded to obtain the services of an interpreter to use American Sign Language in translating the content of the video in an on-screen window for this version of the video. The interpreter was Yvonne DeLong.

This report should be of interest to anyone who works with ESL students and who is looking for an innovative and interesting way to teach idioms. The video contains dramatic vignettes using 25 idioms and correlates with an illustrated facilitator's handbook and a student workbook.

Copies of each version of the video, the two handbooks, the actual scripts that were used to produce the video, and this report are available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA. 17126-0333. Copies are also available from AdvancE.

Statment of the Problem

It is a natural inclination to want to spend time with people who speak your own language, rather than with people who speak some foreign tongue. So it is no surprise that students for whom English is a second language (ESL) frequently speak English only in class. As a result, they don't have the opportunity to experience English as it is really spoken. Idioms are an important part of any language, but are especially difficult to learn because they literally say one thing and mean another. For the student who seldom hears idioms being used, they can be a frustrating barrier to better understanding of English. A program that would enable ESL students to see and hear idioms being used correctly and in proper context would be a valuable teaching tool. According to PDE figures, ESL students represent 21% of the literacy clients in Pennsylvania, and therefore represent a large audience for an instructional program that will enable them to better understand and use American idioms.The goal of this project was to create an instructional package that would enable ESL students to experience idioms as they are used and to learn to use them correctly. In order to accomplish this goal, we established three objectives: to develop a printed instructional package based on the Cultural Literacy Handbook; to create a video that would illustrate the correct use of idioms; and to teach students using the package and evaluate its effectiveness.

Objective 1: To develop a printed instructional manual based on the Cultural Literacy Handbook.

A questionnaire containing 50 assorted idioms was sent to literacy programs in Chester County, Erie, and Allegheny County to be given to ESL students. The questionnaire listed idioms and asked the student to write out what they thought the idioms meant. After reviewing the answers that were submitted, we selected 25 idioms to be included in the handbook for this project. Each idiom had already been illustrated for the Cultural Literacy Handbook. The project director then reviewed materials from PDE in-service workshops to determine the most effective instructional strategies to use in teaching English to ESL students. The method selected was to provide pattern drills for students and teachers to use in small group situations. Also, the handbook provided suggestions for discussion and role playing so that the students themselves could create situations and use the idioms with one another. As the work on the project continued, it became obvious that the best thing to do would be to create a separate version of the book for students and facilitators. The final versions of the handbooks are very similar, but the facilitators handbook provides more suggestions for promting the students, and the student handbook provides opportunities for students to record their own responses to role playing situations. This objective was expanded from the original

specified in the proposal, whcih called for simple instructional sheets rather than a book. But it is felt that the two-booklet format is a better solution. The handbooks are able to be used without the video, as originally intended for the instructional sheets.

Objective 2: To create a video that would illustrate the correct use if idioms in dramatized situations.

Using the idioms selected for the instructional handbook, the project director wrote a script for a video that would illustrate the proper use of the selected idioms. Each idiom would be dealt with in the same fashion: the correct use of the idiom would be dramatized in a scene, then the literal interpretation of the idiom would be dramatized; and finally a narrator would explain the actual meaning of the idiom.

The original proposal specified that volunteers would be recruited from the staff and students of the South Hills Literacy Improvement Center and would be trained to use the video equipment available at the studios of Pittsburgh Community Access TV. The finished videos would then be broadcast on the PCATV. The people at Development Dimensions International, Inc., (DDI) a producer of training materials, had agreed to look over the scripts and to

provide technical assistance to the project as a public service.

However, a fortuitous conversation with Mr. Ric Anthony of DDI, led the project director to a professional video director and producer who was available to do freelance work and who agreed to do the work for a greatly reduced fee. His name is Paul McCollough. Because of his confirmed involvement in the project, professional actors agreed to participate in the video for a small fee and the promise of a copy of the tape for their portfolios. Because of Paul McCollough's association with the video and because of his excellent reputation in the business, we were able to recruit Chuck Aber, also known as "Neighbor Aber" on MisteRogers Neighborhood, to be the narrator for the video. Friends of Paul McCollough liked the idea of the idioms video and some agreed to work for free, and some for a small fee. As a result we had a full crew whose professional credits included work on movies such as The Silence of the Lambs, Lorenzo's Oil, and Night of the Living Dead. Development Dimensions International, Inc. (DDI) donated the use of the studio; lighting, camera, and recording equipment; and editing suite for the production of the video.

It was also because of the involvement of so many professionals that we were able to even consider the production of a version of the video for the hearing impaired. The project director was informed during the work

on the project that the hearing impaired had as much problem with idioms as ESL students. She was able to get the support of Rosemary Garrity of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf for the value of the video to her students. The project director requested additional funding from Dr. John Christopher in order to produce the version for the hearing impaired, and that funding was granted. Ms. Garrity recommended an interpreter who could use American Sign Language to translate the video for the hearing impaired. The interpreter is featured in a window insert in the ESL video.

Although the objective changed during the work on the project, we feel that we exceeded our expectations for this project. The resulting ESL video is obviously professionally done, with sound effects, video effects, original music, and professional actors and actresses. The fact that we even have a version for the hearing impaired is directly attributable to the fact that we had professionals working on this video. Volunteers could not have accomplished it. We did use a few literacy students as "extras" in the video, and the possibility of airing the video on local community TV is still being explored.

Only one part of the original objective was not met. The proposal called for the creation of an interactive video and we did not create an interactive video in the true meaning of the term.. As the project began, it became clear that the cost of doing a truly interactive video was beyond

the budgetary limitations of this project. Instead, the video that was produced contains stop time when the facilitator is instructed to stop the tape and engage in discussion with students to establish their ideas of what they have just seen and heard. Once the discussion has been completed, the facilitator restarts the tape so the students can hear the narrator explain the actual meaning of the idiom.

Objective 3: To teach students using the package and determine its effectiveness.

This project was delayed in beginning because funds were not received until late in the fall. As a result, the tapes and printed materials were completed on time, but not in time to teach ESL students before classes were dismissed for the summer.

Instead, the project director presented the video and instructional package to literacy providers in Chester County, Allegheny County and in Erie, PA. In all instances, the video and instructional materials were very well received and literacy providers expressed their interest in using the package in their programs in the fall of 1993.

Evaluation

The original proposal called for the testing of the instructional package by using it to instruct those students who had completed the original survey. Because of the shortened time available to complete the project, this could not be done. However, literacy professionals who participated in the information session in Erie, and Chester and Allegheny Counties all expressed their hope that the entire package would be available to them and many requested their own copies of the package to use.

In terms of accomplishing objectives that were stipulated in the original proposal, this project was a success. The printed materials go beyond what was required in the proposal. The final ESL video goes beyond what anyone hoped could be accomplished with the monies and abilities available. The production of a version of the video for the hearing impaired was an objective that was added with the requested budget increase and that objective has been met.

Distribution

Copies of each of the videos, each of the handbooks, the actual scripts for the production of the videos and this report are all available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA. 17126-0333, and from AdvancE. The original proposal specified that 50 copies of the ESL

video would be produced; the revised proposal for the budget increase specified an additional 20 tapes of the version for the hearing impaired. But AdvancE has requested that all copies not be send to Harrisburg because of space limitations. Therefore, only about half of the 50 copies of the ESL video, and 15 copies of the version for the hearing impaired will be forwarded to AdvancE. The remaining copies will be held at the offices of the South Hills Literacy Improvement Center and mailed or delivered to literacy programs who have large ESL populations so that they may have their own copies. The master videotape will be held at the offices of the South Hills Literacy Improvement Center to be available to make further copies if necessary.